
BERKELEY'S CASE FOR IDEALISM (*Part 2 of 2*)

Text source:

*A Treatise Concerning the Principles of
Human Knowledge*, sectns. 1-48

BERKELEY'S ARGS VS. MATERIALISM (*continued from last lecture*)

(4) THE NO-RESEMBLANCE ARGUMENT

■ The target view: Lockean Representative Realism

- Lockeans agree that we are only *directly* acquainted with ideas in our minds.
 - But (they claim) these ideas are caused by and represent external material objects.
 - Our ideas are capable of representing these external objects because they resemble them in certain respects (at least with the PQs if not the SQs). If it weren't for these resemblances, our ideas couldn't stand for these mind-independent realities.
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(4) THE NO-RESEMBLANCE ARGUMENT (*continued*)

- “But, say you, though ideas do not exist without the mind, yet there may be things like them whereof they are copies or resemblances, which things exist without the mind, in an unthinking substance. **I answer, an idea can be like nothing but another idea; a colour or figure can be like nothing but another colour or figure.** ... I ask whether those supposed ... external things, of which our ideas are the pictures or representations, be themselves perceivable or no? If they are, then they are ideas, and we have gained our point; but if you say they are not, I appeal to any one whether it be sense, to assert that a colour is like something which is invisible; hard or soft, like something which is intangible; and so of the rest”

(*Principles* section 8)

THE NO-RESEMBLANCE ARGUMENT IN BERKELEY'S *DIALOGUES*

Philonous [the Berkelian]: "...if I understand you rightly, you say our ideas do not exist without the mind; but that they are copies, images or representations of certain originals that do."

Hylas [the Lockean]: "You take me right."

Philonous: "They are then like external things."

Hylas: "They are." ...

Philonous: "But how can that which is sensible be like that which is insensible? Can a real thing in itself *invisible* be like a *colour*; or can a real thing which is not *audible*, be like a *sound*? In other words, can any thing be like a sensation or idea, but another sensation or idea?"

THE POINT OF THE NO-RESEMBLANCE ARGUMENT

- We can only ***think about*** the alleged mind-independent external material objects by using our ideas.
 - But if none of our ideas can ever ***resemble*** external material objects, then we cannot use these ideas to think about such supposed external objects. ***We cannot even comprehend the thought that such things exist.***
 - Possible objections:
 - Is Berkeley right to say that there is no resemblance between our ideas and mind-independent external material objects ?
 - Do we really need such a resemblance between ideas and mind-independent external material objects in order to think about such objects?
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(5) BERKELEY'S 'MASTER ARGUMENT'

“I am prepared to put the whole on this issue; if you can but conceive it possible for one extended movable substance, or in general, for any one idea, or anything like an idea, to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it, I shall readily give up the cause. ...

“But say you, surely there is nothing easier than to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books existing in a closet, and no body to perceive them. I answer, you may so, there is no difficulty in it: but what is all this, I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call books and trees, and at the same time omitting to frame the idea of any one that may perceive them. But do you not yourself perceive or think them all the while. This therefore is nothing to the purpose: it only shows you have the power of imagining or forming ideas in your mind; but it doth not show that you can conceive it possible, the objects of your thought may exist without the mind: to make this out, it is necessary that you conceive them existing unconceived or unthought of, which is a manifest repugnancy. When we do our utmost to conceive of external bodies, we are all the while only contemplating our own ideas.” (*Principles* 22-3)

BERKELEY'S 'MASTER ARGUMENT' IN THE *DIALOGUES*

Philonous: “But (to pass by all that hath been hitherto said, and reckon it for nothing, if you will have it so) I am content to put the whole upon this one issue. If you can conceive it possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any sensible object whatsoever, to exist without the mind, then I will grant that it actually be so.”

Hylas: “If it comes to that the point will easily be decided. What more easy to conceive a tree or house existing by itself, independent of, and unperceived by any mind whatsoever. I do at this present time conceive them existing after that manner.”

Philonous: “How say you Hylas, can you see a thing which is at the same time unseen?”

Hylas: “No, that were a contradiction.”

Philonous: “Is it not as great a contradiction to talk of *conceiving* a thing which is *unconceived*?”

POPULAR OBJECTIONS TO BERKELEY'S IDEALISM

(1) Doesn't idealism make the world unreal?

- Berkeley replies in *Principles* sections 34-40.
- “I do not argue against the existence of any one thing that we can apprehend, either by sense or reflexion. That the things I see with mine eyes and touch with my hands do exist, really exist, I make not the least question. The only thing whose existence we deny, is that which the philosophers call matter or corporeal substance. And in doing this, there is no damage done to the rest of mankind, who, I dare say, will never miss it. ... If any man thinks this detracts from the existence or reality of things, he is very far from understanding what hath been premised in the plainest terms I could think of.”

(*Principles*, sections 35-6)

POPULAR OBJECTIONS TO BERKELEY'S IDEALISM (*continued*)

(2) Doesn't idealism make things go in and out of existence according to whether they are being observed at any given moment?

- Berkeley replies *Principles* sections 45-8.

(3) Isn't idealism in conflict with physical science?

- Berkeley replies in *Principles* section 50.
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